

TWO-YEAR UPDATE

Protection of civilians: impact of hostilities on civilians since 24 February 2022



A human rights officer visits the site of a rocket attack that hit a residential building in Kharkiv on 23 January.

Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russian armed forces launched a full-scale armed attack on Ukraine. In the two years since, the civilian population in Ukraine has endured immense suffering and harm. Thousands of civilians have lost their lives or sustained life-changing injuries – or have family members who have done so. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) has verified that conflict-related violence in this two-year period killed more than 10,000 civilians and injured nearly 20,000. The actual numbers are likely significantly higher.

Millions across the country have lost their homes, been forced to flee, or endured other hardship due to lack of access to basic services as a result of the war. The hostilities have damaged and destroyed hundreds of medical and educational institutions, with significant impact on children's access to education and people's access to health services, and critical infrastructure related to for example energy and grain export, causing hardship, particularly during the winter months, and threatening livelihoods. Entire cities have been destroyed.

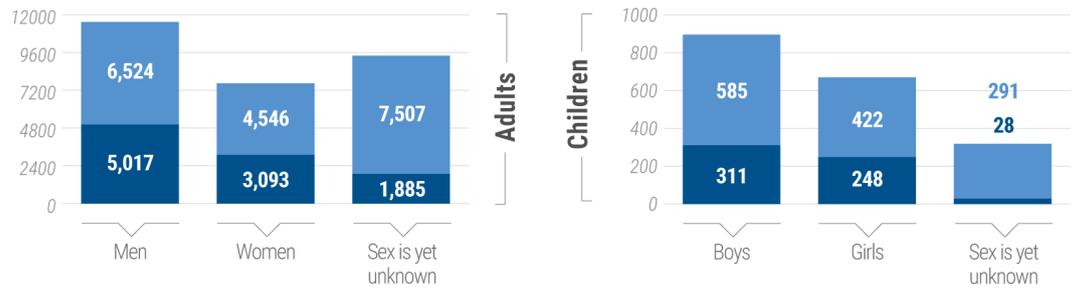
This update summarizes some of the main patterns and trends of civilian harm that HRMMU has identified in the two-year period since 24 February 2022.¹

Overall civilian casualties

Since 24 February 2022, conflict-related violence in Ukraine has killed at least 10,582 civilians and injured 19,875 (30,457 total civilian casualties). This number includes 587 killed and 1,298 injured children (1,885 child casualties).² Of the adults, men were disproportionately affected, accounting for 60 per cent of the casualties.³

Civilian casualty numbers were particularly high during the first few months after the armed attack, with thousands of civilians killed and injured per month. While the numbers gradually decreased over the course of 2022 and 2023, they remained high, with an average of 163 civilians killed and 547 injured per month in 2023.

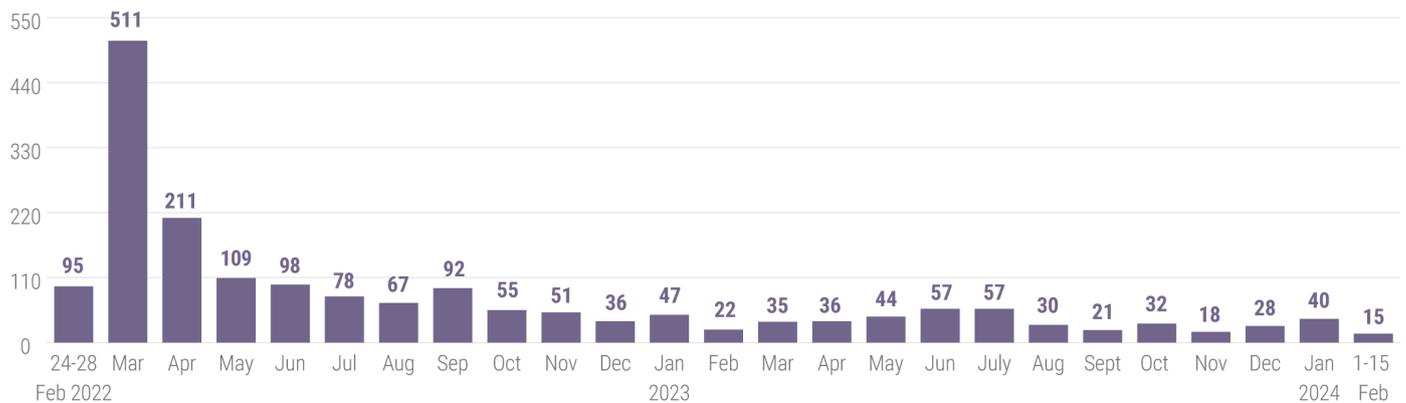
Civilian casualties since 24 February 2022, by age and sex



Civilian casualties since 24 February 2022, by month

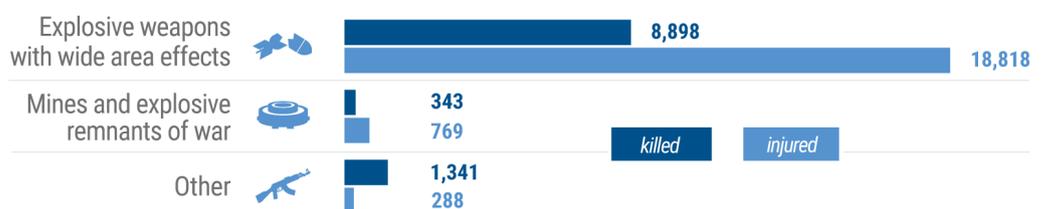


Child casualties since 24 February 2022, by month



In terms of cause of death or injury, the vast majority of civilian casualties (91 per cent) were caused by explosive weapons with wide area effects. Mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) accounted for 3.7 per cent, while other weapons and incidents accounted for the remainder.

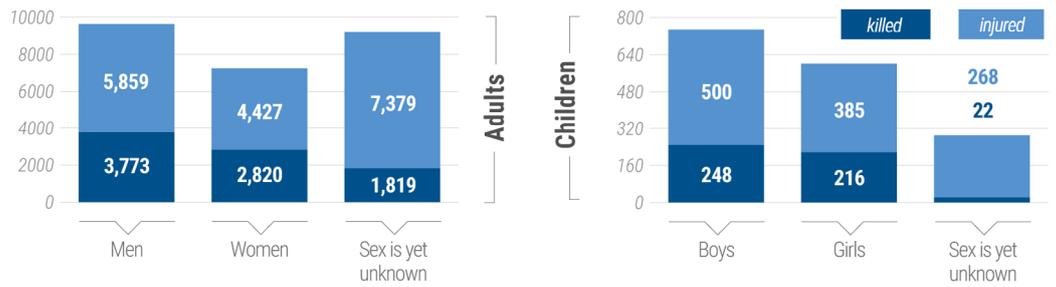
Civilian casualties since 24 February 2022, by type of weapon/incident



Explosive weapons with wide area effects

In the two-year period, 8,898 civilians were killed and 18,818 injured by explosive weapons with wide area effects. The weapon types that caused the most casualties included shelling from artillery, tanks and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), cruise and ballistic missiles (air, sea and land-based), and air strikes, including loitering munitions and other unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Among the casualties were 1,639 children (486 killed and 1,153 injured). As with the overall numbers, men accounted for the majority of adult casualties, likely a reflection of the fact that women and children to a larger extent than men left frontline communities and even the country to flee from the violence.

Civilian casualties from explosive weapons with wide area effects since 24 February 2022, by age and sex

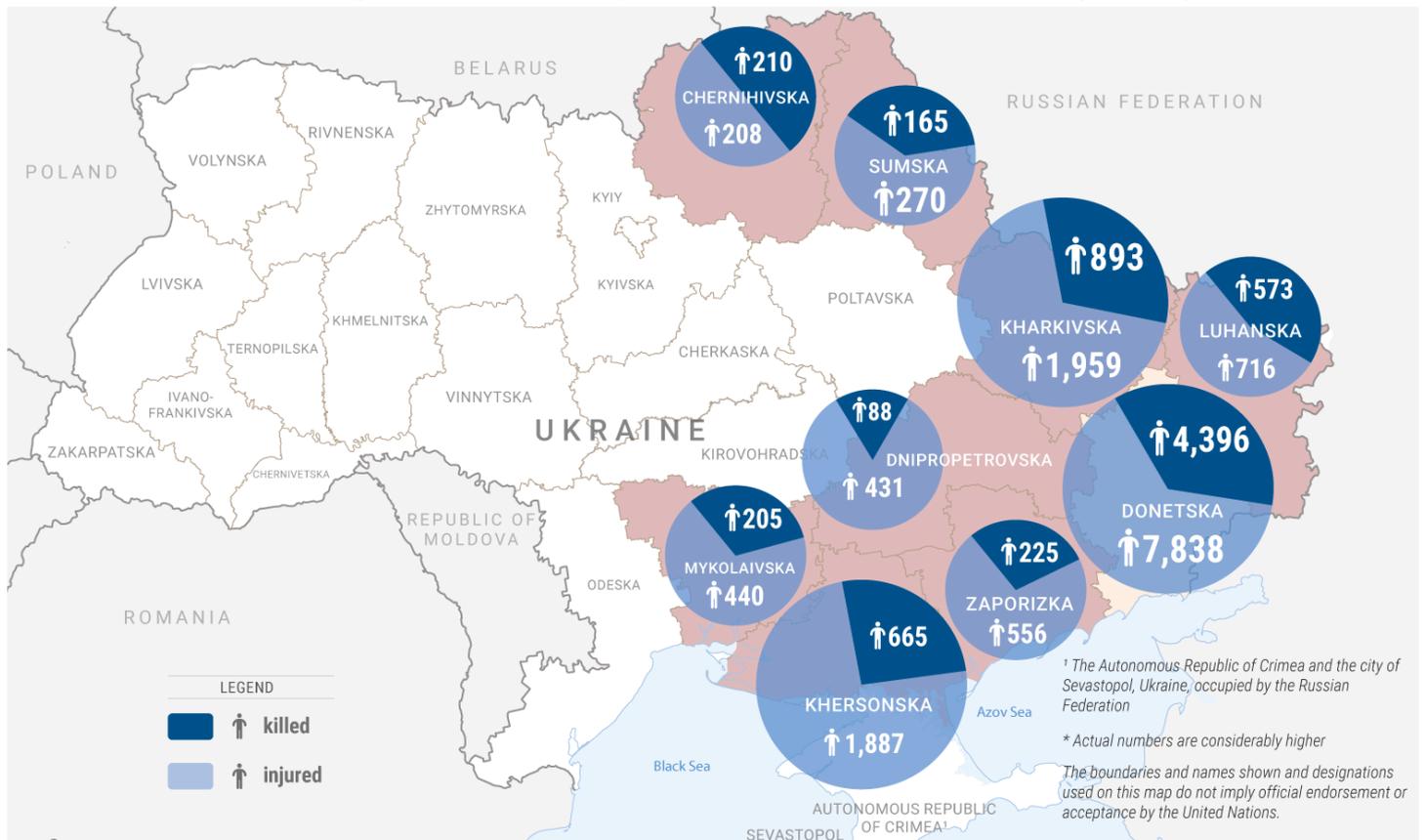


The vast majority of casualties from explosive weapons took place in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine and was therefore in most cases likely a result of attacks launched by Russian armed forces.

Civilian casualties from explosive weapons with wide area effects since 24 February 2022, by territory where casualties occurred



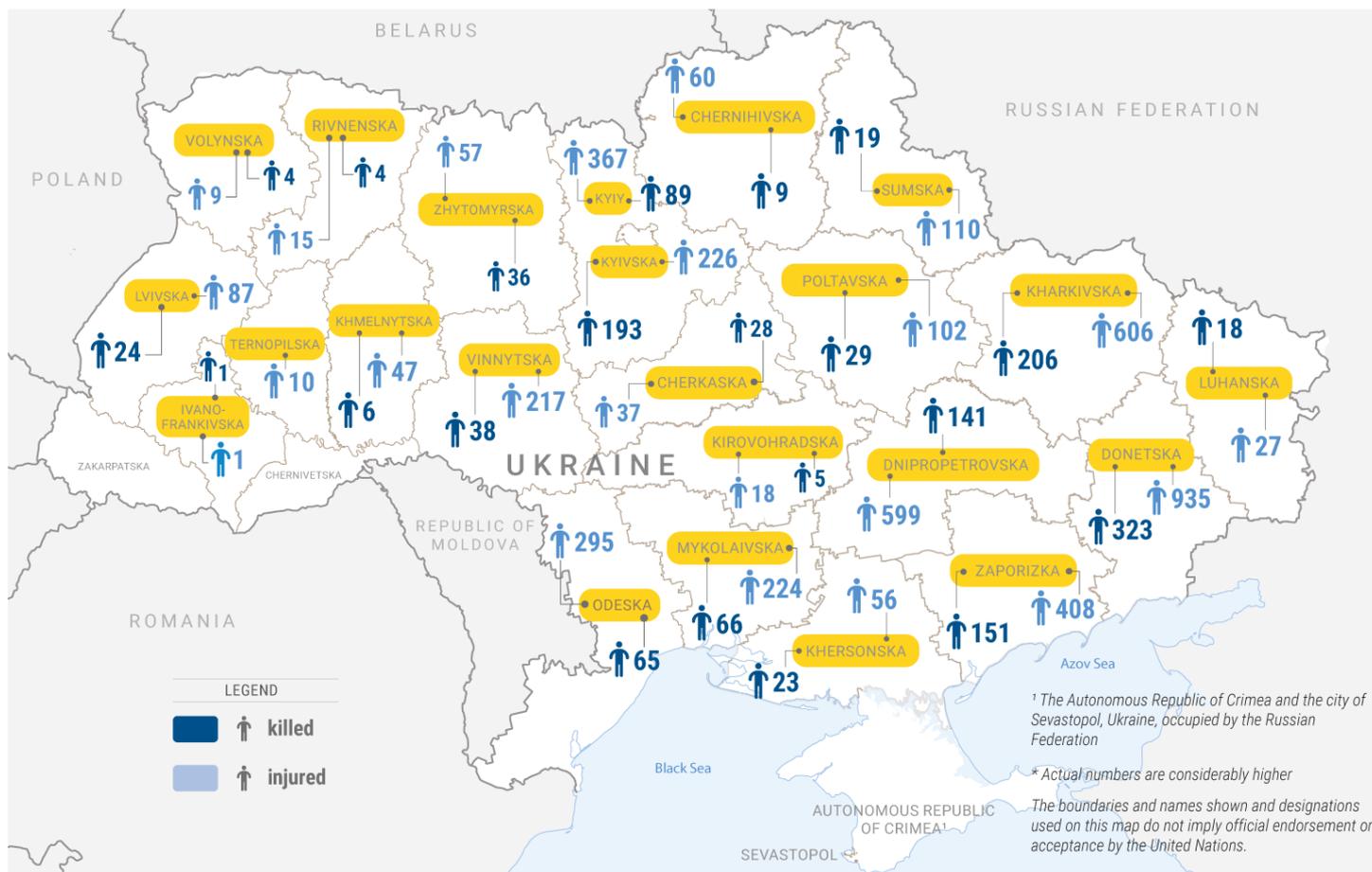
Civilian casualties from artillery, MLRS and other weapons near the frontline since 24 February 2022, by oblast



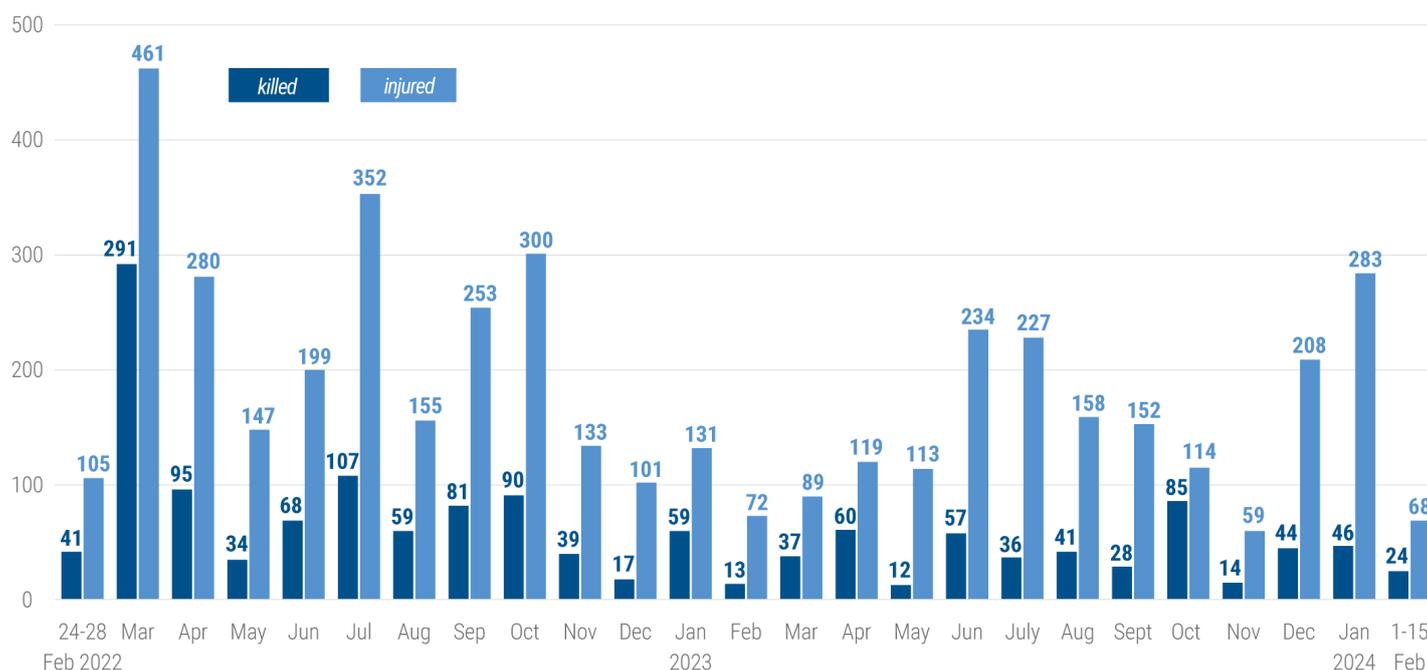
Most of the casualties from explosive weapons with wide area effects (78 per cent) occurred near the frontline from artillery shells, multiple-launch rocket systems, and air-dropped bombs. Among casualties near the frontline, older people accounted for a disproportionately high percentage as they were often not able or willing to leave their homes; people over 60 made up 36 per cent of civilian casualties near the frontline although they represent 25 per cent of the population.⁴

A significant number of casualties, however, occurred across the country far from the frontline. The use of long-range missiles and loitering munitions against targets across the country by the Russian Federation left virtually no place in the country entirely safe from the hostilities. In the two-year period, HRMMU verified civilian casualties from explosive weapons with wide area effects in 22 Ukraine's oblasts and Kyiv city, many of which were primarily affected by missile attacks and loitering munitions. After 2022, civilian casualties from missiles and loitering munitions spiked twice: in June and July 2023 and again in December 2023 and January 2024.

Civilian casualties from missiles and loitering munitions since 24 February 2022, by oblast



Civilian casualties from missiles and loitering munitions since 24 February 2022, by month



Cluster munitions accounted for 3.6 per cent of the casualties from explosive weapons with wide area effects (263 killed and 733 injured), with casualties occurring on both sides of the frontline.

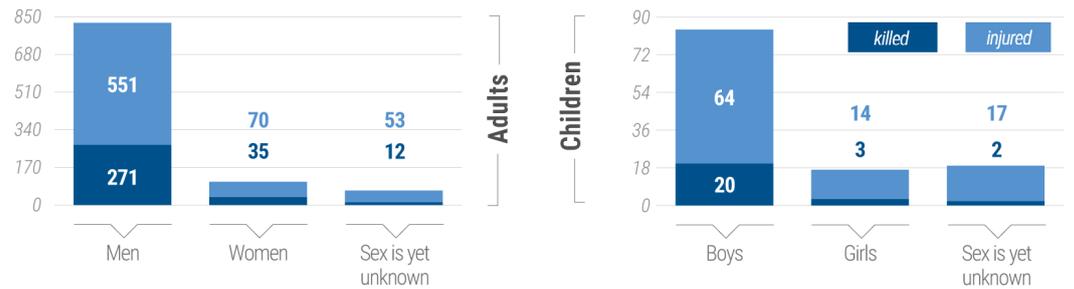
Mines and explosive remnants of war

Mines and explosive remnants of war killed 343 civilians and injured 769 in the two-year period, the majority of which occurred in areas after the frontline moved. Kharkiv and Kherson regions saw some of the highest civilian casualty numbers from mines and ERW in spring 2023 following the retreat of Russian armed forces from those areas as civilians started working their land with tractors, walked or drove in forests or other rural areas, repaired roads or tried to demine a contaminated site. Such incidents disproportionately affected men and boys (88 per cent of all cases⁵). A significant number of members of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine were also killed or injured in such incidents.

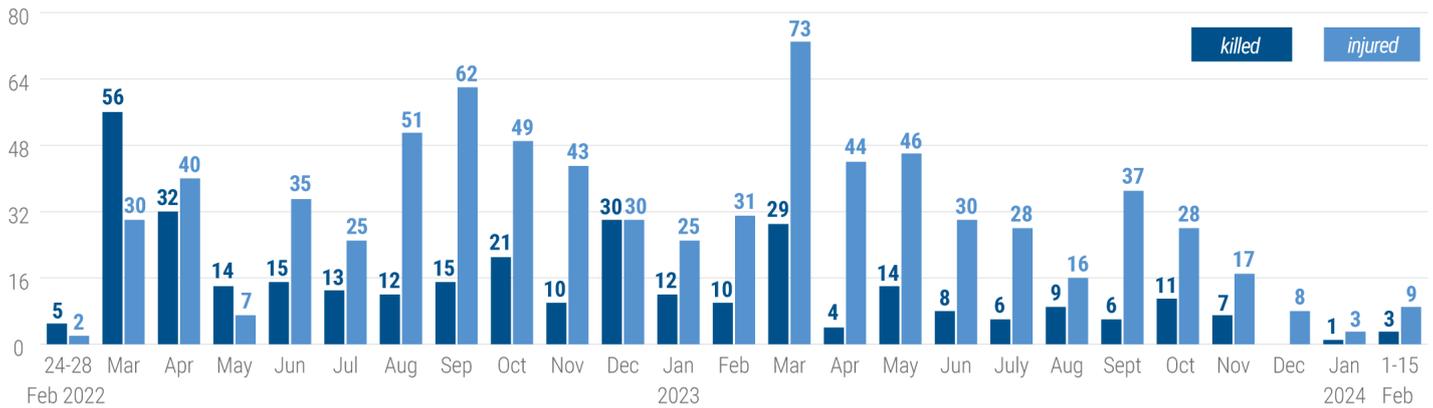


"Dangerous, mines" sign on the seashore in Chernomorsk city (Odesa region).

Civilian casualties from mines and explosive weapons of war (ERWs) since 24 February 2022, by age and sex



Civilian casualties from mines and explosive weapons of war (ERWs) since 24 February 2022, by month

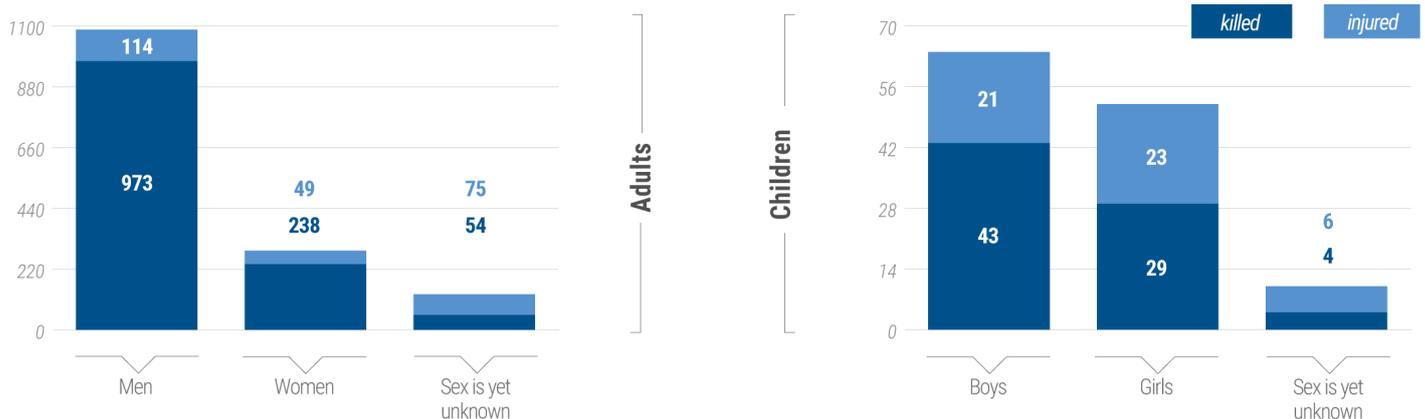


Other weapons or types of incidents

1,341 civilians were killed and 288 injured by other weapons or types of incidents. These include fire from small arms and light weapons due to crossfire, escalation of force incidents (where the military opened fire on civilians perceived as a threat), wilful killings, and road accidents involving military or civilian vehicles driven by military personnel in the area of hostilities.

A significant number of civilians in this category were killed or injured when Russian armed forces opened fire on their cars when they were trying to flee areas just as Russian armed forces were establishing control. Many of these cases occurred in Kyiv and Chernihiv regions in February and March 2022.⁶ Often, several members of the same family were killed and injured in the same incidents. 155 civilians were killed by summary execution, most of them men.⁷

Civilian casualties from other weapons or types of incidents since 24 February 2022, by sex and age

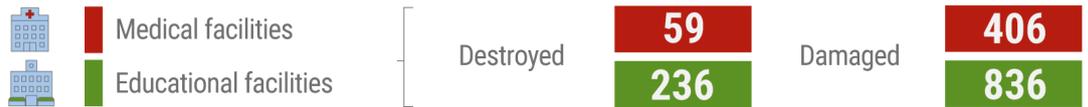


Damage to civilian infrastructure

In the two-year period, attacks with explosive weapons damaged or destroyed hundreds of educational and medical facilities. HRMMU has recorded that hostilities affected 1,072 educational facilities (236 destroyed and 836 damaged) and 465 medical facilities (59 destroyed and 406 damaged) since 24 February 2022.

Attacks launched by the Russian armed forces have also damaged and destroyed critical infrastructure. For several months from 10 October 2022, Russian missiles and loitering munitions damaged and destroyed energy-related infrastructure across the country, imposing significant hardship on the civilian population due to disruption of electricity and heating service.⁸ Since 11 July 2023, dozens of attacks damaged or destroyed facilities related to grain production and export in territory under the control of Ukraine, including port facilities, grain silos and vehicles for transporting grain.⁹

Damage to educational and medical facilities since 24 February 2022



Destroyed school in Arkhanhelske settlement (Kherson region).

Damage to the environment

Hostilities have also had numerous negative consequences on the environment. Burning fuel and oil depots set ablaze by attacks with explosive weapons have polluted the air. Explosive remnants of war have contaminated the soil in addition to threatening people's livelihoods, especially for farmers.

The incident with the largest environmental impact attack, however, was the breach of the Kakhovka dam in June 2023.¹⁰ Its destruction led to the release of a vast quantity of 18 cubic kilometres of water over three to four days, which flooded at least 80 downstream communities adjacent to the Dnipro river. According to a joint assessment by the Government of Ukraine and the UN, the flooding from the breach damaged over 37,000 homes, 37 educational institutions and an estimated 11 health facilities, and disrupted the provision of drinking water and sanitation services to one million people, impacting their rights to housing, education, health and water.¹¹ The disappearance of the reservoir, which was the water source for a vast agricultural irrigation network, will sharply reduce food supply and decrease income for farmers in the long term. The flooding destroyed over 11,000 hectares of forest and damaged natural habitats, chemically polluting them and causing irreversible consequences for biological diversity. The damaged areas included critical ecosystems, including five sites on the Ramsar List (List of Wetlands of International Importance) and 12 sites under the Emerald Network (under the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats). All these consequences will severely impair the rights to an adequate standard of living and to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, both in the short and long term.

Methodology

HRMMU collects information about civilian harm from conflict-related violence from a wide range of sources, including through interviews with victims, their relatives, and witnesses; open-source information, including photo and video material; forensic records and reports; criminal investigation materials; court documents; reports by international and national non-governmental organisations; public reports by law enforcement and military actors; data from medical facilities and local authorities.

All sources and information are assessed for their relevance and credibility and cross-checked against other information. In some instances, corroboration takes time. This means that conclusions on civilian casualties may be revised as more information becomes available and numbers may change as new information emerges over time.

Statistics presented in the current update are based on individual records of civilian harm where the "reasonable grounds to believe" standard of proof was met, namely where, based on a body of verified information, an ordinarily prudent observer would have reasonable grounds to believe that the harm took place as described. HRMMU refers to information that meets this criteria as "verified."

The actual extent of civilian harm – both casualties and infrastructure damage – is likely considerably higher as many reports of civilian harm, particularly from the period immediately after the full-scale armed attack, have not been possible to verify due to the large number of reports and the lack of access to relevant areas. The number of civilian casualties is likely particularly undercounted in cities where there was protracted intensive fighting at the start of the armed attack in 2022 – such as Mariupol (Donetsk region), Lysychansk, Popasna, and Sievierodonetsk (Luhansk region).

1. For more detailed information, see [HRMMU's periodic and thematic reports](#).
2. All figures in this update are as of 15 February 2024.
3. The percentage is calculated on the basis of records for which sex is known.
4. The percentage is calculated on the basis of records for which age is known. See also HRMMU, [Update on the human rights situation of older persons in Ukraine in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation](#), 24 May 2023, paras. 14-16.
5. The percentage is calculated on the basis of records for which sex is known.
6. OHCHR, [Killings of civilians: summary executions and attacks on individual civilians in Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions in the context of the Russian Federation's armed attack against Ukraine](#), 7 December 2022, paras. 63-74.
7. OHCHR, [Killings of civilians](#), paras. 31-62.
8. OHCHR, [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 February to 31 July 2023](#), 4 October 2023, paras. 39-40.
9. OHCHR, [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 August to 30 November 2023](#), 12 December 2023, paras. 29-31.
10. OHCHR, [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 February to 31 July 2023](#), paras. 36-39.
11. Government of Ukraine and United Nations, Post-Disaster Needs Assessment: 2023 Kakhovka Dam Disaster, Ukraine, October 2023.



A man standing on a balcony of a damaged residential building in Mykolaiv.